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The Duty of Praying for others :
on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany.

N^o 17

Enforced by some

ARGUMENTS

Taken from the

Success of those PRAYERS,
which the Church made for St.
Peter's Deliverance from Prison.

The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous
Man availeth much. James v. 16.



By Wm Romaine. M.A.



• L O N D O N :

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A C T S xii. 5.

Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church, unto God for him.



HEROD, a persecutor of the church, stretched forth his hand to vex some of its members, and he killed *James* the brother of *John* with the sword; and because he saw that it pleased the *Jews*, he proceeded farther to take *Peter* also. He committed him to prison, chained him to two other persons, and gave him in charge to sixteen soldiers, who were four at a time night and day to be keeping watch over him. And after *Easter* he intended to have put him to death; but on the very night before his execution, *Peter* is wonderfully delivered, contrary to *Herod's* purpose, the prisoner's hopes, and the keepers intentions. By what means was this brought about? By the church's prayers. From the time *Peter* was apprehended, prayers were made without ceasing for him; and when the faithful knew his execution was fixed for the next day, they were resolved to wrestle all night with God in prayer for him. Accordingly they besiege the throne of grace with their earnest and hearty requests

requests for *Peter's* deliverance, and they are heard. While they are praying God gives in the prisoner among them, as an answer to their prayers.

Upon this fact I will make some practical remarks, for the use of God's people at this time. What I shall offer at present relates only to true believers, and I hope God will put it into their hearts to hear me with profit and improvement to their souls. My brethren, you see the distressed state of our affairs. All *Europe* is in confusion, our affairs are unsettled at home, and we are at war abroad, and with enemies who boast themselves in their victories and conquests. But the dearest thing to us is in most danger. The protestant religion is ready to be destroyed, and the Lord seems to have given us up to our bloody persecutors. Look around you, you see no prospect of deliverance by any human means: what course then shall we take? Whither shall we go for help? God must be our only refuge. If we can trust in him for deliverance, he will deliver us: and if we have any trust in him, we shall certainly express it in prayer. And for our encouragement to pray, and to expect a blessing upon our prayers, let us meditate upon the history before us; and may God so direct me to speak, and you to hear, that we may pray without ceasing, as they did in the text, until our success be like theirs. O that God would pour down upon us the spirit of prayer and supplication, and make us a praying people, until he deliver us from all our enemies, and make us an happy people. To this end, let us consider some of the chief practical uses to be made of the text. And

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First, we may remark, That whenever the faithful are in any great danger or trouble, if God intends to deliver them, he puts it into their hearts to pray for deliverance. We have many examples of this in scripture, and many express passages, whereon to ground this doctrine. We are never able to pray aright without God's assistance. It is the office of the "Holy Spirit to help our infirmities; for we know not, says the apostle, what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us." *Rom. viii. 26.* He helpeth our infirmities before we pray, by letting us see our wants, and he helpeth us in praying, by enabling us to pray with faith, and to ask what he knows our heavenly father will grant us. Thus he put it into their hearts to pray without ceasing for *Peter's* deliverance. If he had not helped their infirmities, every circumstance made so much against them, that they could have had no hopes from their prayers. But he strengthened their faith, and they looked beyond all difficulties. They saw a way open for *Peter* to escape, notwithstanding *Herod's* cruelty, the strictness and number of the guard, the closeness of the prison, and the nearness of *Peter's* death. They knew God was able, and they believed it would be for his glory, to deliver him, and therefore they prayed without ceasing.

My brethren, do you find yourselves stirred up much to prayer in the present troublesome times? Are your hearts greatly disposed to pray, that God would put an end to these troubles, and to preserve to us the blessings of the protestant religion? Do you spend much time with God, do you wrestle with him in prayer, resolved

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“ not to let him go,” until he hear and answer? If this be the case, we shall certainly be preserved. If the Lord’s people be led out into fervent and earnest prayer, if they pray often alone, and often with one another, for the peace of our *Jerusalem*, then we need not despair. Though all things make against us, as they did in *Peter’s* case, yet if God put it into our hearts to pray for deliverance, as he did into the hearts of the faithful then, we may promise ourselves the like blessed answer to our prayers, which they met with.

And this is my *second* practical remark. The prayer of faith never returns without a blessing. *Peter* is kept chained in prison, his enemies many, his friends few — his enemies have all earthly power in their hands to destroy him — his friends have only God to apply to for his deliverance, and to him they go. His enemies plot, his friends pray. Their plot against *Peter’s* life humanly speaking could not be defeated — to-morrow he must die; but prayer brought down God to his assistance. The prison doors were safely shut, but prayer opened the doors of heaven: and God, to let us see the power of prayer, sent him to his friends while they were praying, as if God had said — There (since you will take no denial) there he is, thus plainly pointing out the means of his deliverance. The prayer of *Elijah* had the same success. He could open and shut heaven. And if the prayer of one righteous man could avail so much, what could not the joint prayer of many righteous men do? It would bear down all before it, and prevail in heaven and earth. It would reach up to God, and lie before the throne of his grace, and never depart without its answer; and when answered,

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it would come down with authority, and force all human power to submit. The scripture every where speaks of the efficacy of prayer. The promise of God to it is very encouraging. "Call upon me in the time of trouble, so will I hear thee, and thou shalt praise me." I will give thee reason to praise me, by delivering thee from thy trouble. And God has ever fulfilled this promise. There is not an instance in scripture of the church's joining in a common petition to God, but he always heard and answered it. And indeed how should it fail of success, being indited by the Holy Spirit, and presented by Jesus Christ, and perfumed with the sweet incense of his merits? It then becomes the prayer of Jesus Christ himself. He presents it as his own, and how can God the father reject the prayer of his beloved son? So far from rejecting it, he represents it to be as delightful to him as the most fragrant odors are to us. For thus St. *John* speaking of our Lord under the character of the angel of the covenant, says (*Rev. viii.*) — "There was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne, and the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up (with acceptance) before God out of the angel's hand." Let your prayers ascend up with the sweet-smelling savour of his merits, and you have his word of promise, that whatever you shall ask the father in his name, you shall receive.

Now my christian friends and brethren (for to such only I am now speaking) since you are convinced of these truths, are you careful to practise them? Let us look back, and each of us examine
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our own consciences. How much time have we spent of this day in prayer for the distressed of our fellow creatures? Many are in prison, have we prayed for them? Several christians are in distress, our reformed brethren persecuted in *France*, our brethren in blood as well as in faith suffering in *America*, the christian world in war and confusion, and the protestant interest nearly destroyed; have we been earnest with God this day in prayer, that he would put an end to all these calamities? How justly may God leave us destitute of his help, if we have not been pleading with him for help for others? And if there be any one of us whose conscience now informs him, that he has not sympathised and suffered this day with all the suffering members of Christ, let such a man now humble himself and say, O Lord, do not excommunicate me out of the hearts of thine for my coldness towards them: how shall I expect help from others prayers, who have been wanting in my prayers for them? Where was my fervent brotherly love, that I would not do that for a brother, which I owe to an enemy, *viz.* to pray for him. O Lord forgive the offence of thy servant, and pour down upon me the spirit of prayer and supplication. This done, resolve not to close your eyes this night, until you have improved your interest in God. You have a key that will open any lock, let no christian lie in chains by you, either in bodily or spiritual chains. If he be sick, pray him into health. If poor, pray him rich. If troubled in mind, pray him into comfort. It is for want of our prayers, that men lie so long under their burdens. If we would jointly commend them unto God, he would either deliver them,

them, or what is the same, he would sanctify and sweeten the affliction, and make it as great a blessing as a deliverance. If you can do nothing else, pray for your brethren. You may not have other means of helping them, but the poorest christian has an interest with God, and if he use it in prayer, it will do them and him a real service : for prayer in this case for others is a clearer evidence of grace, than prayer for ourselves.

Since the times then so loudly call upon us, let us join in prayer for all those that are troubled in mind, body, or estate ; and that we may appear as the members of one body, actuated by the same spirit under one head, let us all agree, at whatever distance we may happen to be, at one and the same hour to meet together at the throne of grace. And what hour can we pitch upon more proper for this sacred employment, and more free from worldly avocations, than from eight o'clock to nine on the Lord's-Day evening ? The attendance upon the public offices of the day is then over. The mind is collected and serious. By what more likely means can we hope to keep it in the same sweet frame, than to close the day with an act of devotion ? If God's people would enter into an holy league, and oblige themselves to spend this part of the day in their several closets during these troublesome times, they would infallibly succeed in their petitions. Tell me, whenever the church's joint prayers did miscarry, in what place, in what case, or for what people ? There is not an instance, wherein they failed. Prayers have been made for men in the church (good men and bad) and for men out of the church — and they have suc-

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ceeded. Prayers have been made by land and upon the sea, and with success — they have prevailed above-ground, under-ground, in dens and caves, and dungeons. Prayers have relieved dying men, poor men, prisoners, and captives; they have been made for men against temptations and sorrows, against the rage of persecutors and devils, and they have prevailed. And why should not prayer be as omnipotent now, as it has been formerly? Suppose our national sins cry aloud for vengeance, let our prayers cry louder for mercy. When one *Elijah* stood up for stiff-necked *Israel*, and one *Amos* for rebellious *Judah*, God shewed mercy; and *Elijah* and *Amos* were men of like passions with us: encouraged by their success, let us be importunate at the throne of grace, while God allows us an hour for prayer. And let none of us be discouraged as if it was too late; our danger indeed is great, but while God calls in his word, it is not too late to call to him in prayer. He often sees men sinking, before he comes to their help. Our extremity is his opportunity. When *Peter* is within a few hours of death, then is God's time to deliver him.

But perhaps some of you may say, I have been praying and waiting long, and yet see no success. So did the church. They pray for *Peter* week after week, without ceasing night or day, and still the prison is shut and his chains are on. And now they have but one night more to wait, and they wait and pray, until *Peter* comes in among them. If then we have but one day, or one hour more to spend, let us spend it in prayer, not doubting but the God that heareth prayer will

will answer. Deliverance will come, be it at the last hour, if the prayer of faith wait for it. Experience, and the word of God, prove it ever was so, and it ever shall. Dispute not then, only believe. Go and open thy wants to God as thy reconciled father, ask a supply of Christ God-man, thy saviour and mediator, through God the Holy Ghost as the inditer of thy prayers. Set thy faith to work. Before thou begin, say with the prophet, I will call and the Lord will answer; and when thou hast finished, believe that in due time and manner thou shalt be answered. Thus pray, let faith enter into thy suit, and end, and subscribe it, and God will as soon deny himself, as deny thee thy heart's desire.

But this point deserves farther consideration. Many serious, well-meaning persons are very apt to be discouraged at God's delay in granting their requests. Let us go to the history before us for light into this particular, and let this be the *third* practical use to be made of the text. The church had been long at prayers, but God did not answer till the last hour. That was his time, which is always the best. If he does not answer immediately, he delays for wise and good reasons. He would remind us of our former behaviour to him. How often did he call by mercies, by judgments, and by his word, but we would not hear. He prayed us again and again to leave our sins, and come to him, but we would not answer, therefore it is a just reproof, that we should call, and not be heard. God seems not to hear, to spur us on to pray the more earnestly. He seems deaf, that we might speak out, and show that we might be ear-

neft. Thus *Daniel* interprets it in the ninth chapter. God defers and delays, fays he, but it is only to try me, therefore he prays with more warmth and fervour, "O Lord hear, O Lord forgive, O Lord hearken and do, defer not for thine own fake, O my God." And he goes on praying with fo much vehemence, that while he was yet fpeaking the angel *Gabriel* is fent unto him with an answer. Though God delay, yet he will answer. And if his delays begin to difcourage us, let us ftudy the courfe of his providence, and be comforted to wait on. Behold how the husbandman waits. He does not think of fowing and reaping the fame day. But his corn lies buried for fome time, and dies, yea it grows downward, before it fhots upward; and when it is up, it receives many a check, yet ftill he waits, becaufe he hath experience. So muft we. When we have fown our feed, and our prayers feem to be buried and dead, and all things appear worfe with us after prayer, than they were before, yet we fhould wait, and learn experience from our own and other mens fuccefs. Never was the feed of prayer fown, but there was a crop, although it was a late harveft.

I wifh the harveft was come, fays one, I have been praying long, and without fuccefs. How long have you prayed? *Abraham* prayed thirty years for a child; *Isaac* prayed twenty, but their prayers were heard at laft. How long did the faithful pray for the incarnation of the lord of life? — four thoufand years before he came. And yet he did come; therefore pray on.

But you have ufed all means, prayed yourfelf, got others to pray for you, and yet you have

have no answer. And might not *Peter* have said the same : there was not a christian in *Jerusalem*, but had been praying for him, and yet still he is in prison ?

But you think matters go worse with you, the more you pray ; the more you pray for faith, the less you have ; the more you pray against temptations, the more they beset you. Is not this as we said, the corn must go backward before it comes forward ? Was it not so with *Abraham* and *Sarah*, the longer they prayed, the elder they grew.

But you think your sins grow stronger by prayer. No ! this cannot be. Only you feel sin more than you did before. It is not because sin is stronger, but because you are sounder : for these motions of sin, are not motions of life, but symptoms of death. Take comfort, the pangs of death are now upon your lusts ; they are struggling for life. Keep on your prayers, and soon you will have a happy deliverance.

But you say, your comforts come too late, I am quite wearied out. Never say it is too late, so long as God bids you pray, and you can pray, and God's people have hearts to pray for you. If *Peter* be delivered by midnight or by day-break, it is as well, as if he had been out a month before. God does not delay, because he will not grant, but because he would quicken you, and stir you up to ask with greater earnestness. If your petition be not according to his will, never make it ; but if it be, never leave it. Keep on praying, as they did in the text, until *Peter* came in among them. Remember the poor widow, and learn from her not to be faint
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or weary in your prayers — She had to deal with a judge, and not a father — a hard rigorous judge, and she was alone, a simple orator, and yet she carried her suit by her importunity. If a judge that neither feared God nor regarded man could thus be won, shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, although he bear long with them? What an encouragement is this to continuance in prayer, though God should delay long! We here see that his delays are not denials. O Lord help our faith, that having precept, promise, God's servants, God's own blessed son, on our side, we may never be put off with any delay; but may have strength to keep on our suit, so long as an hour or a minute is left. Let us pray with faith and patience, not doubting but God will bring about our deliverance, not only after delays, but after all human means fail, which is the *fourth* circumstance in the history before us, worthy of our attention.

Many persons are apt to be stumbled, when they see no outward means of deliverance. Although they have the word of promise in their hands, yet they are tempted to think their case desperate, when they see no way open to escape. And when this comes after many and long delays, it is often discouraging. But we should consider that the Lord never wants means. *St. Peter* had good reason to say from his own experience, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver his people."—He is never at a loss. If they know how to pray, he always knows how to deliver. His wisdom is infinite to find out means, his power is almighty to carry them into execution, nay
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if need be to create them. He is the Lord of hosts, all creatures, and all elements obey him. If we want his help at land or sea, he is Lord of all. If we be in prison, he can open any jail. He can make strangers and enemies, yea all things work together for our good. Look not then at the want of means, but at his promise, who can work without means, and against means. Cast thy care upon God, and he will care for thee. Is thy burden poverty? Cast it upon him, and he will help thee. Is it sin or sorrow? Whatever it be, he can bear it, and discharge thee.

But still thou art afraid, thou seeest no means. Suppose they had reasoned, in *Peter's* case, as thou dost? If we had a friend at court to use his interest with *Herod*, or if we had a friend in the watch whom we could bribe, or if the jailor would suffer us to come at *Peter*, then we might have some hopes, but now all human means fail us, why need we pray any longer? They had more faith than to reason in this manner. They knew, that God had means out of our reach. If men could not deliver *Peter*, an angel should. If thou believest, he will find or create means to deliver thee. All things are possible to him that believeth.

But thou seeest so many difficulties in the way, that thy case seems desperate, and it is not possible to help thee. What are difficulties to him, who speaks the word, and all nature obeys. His power is shut out of no place, and is every where almighty. Does thy case require more power than *Peter's* did? Go to the prison, there is a strong guard. Pass the guard, there is a door.

door. Pass it, there is a chain. Get through it, there is an iron gate — and come at last to *Peter*, he is chained fast to two men. What do all these avail against God? If *Peter's* friends can break through these discouragements to prayer, God will break through these and a thousand more to their comfort.

“O but, says weak faith, God works no wonders at present.” No? What is not his name still, the *wonderful God*? Is not his power and his wisdom as great as ever? Are not his promises as good? Is not his love and our want of it, as much as ever? Have we not still the same loving favour, and the same interest in him? All things stand, as they did before. And if we use the former means, we shall infallibly find the former success, and God will do exceeding abundantly above all that we can either ask or think. We have the Lord's promise for this, and our own experience. What man is there any way acquainted with God and this holy duty, who ever found his prayers unsuccessful! When didst thou ever speak to thy heavenly father, but he answered thee with some ease or some comfort? When didst thou ever pray, but thy heart was somewhat refreshed? Fear not then but the Lord will still do wonders? Is any thing too hard for God? Has he made any promise, that he cannot perform? No certainly. Faith finds no variableness in him, nor shadow of turning, but experiences him to be the God that heareth prayer, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever.

The history would afford many more practical remarks, but here I stop. Let these four suffice. *First*, When God intends to deliver his

his people out of any trouble, he puts it into their hearts to pray for deliverance. *Secondly*, Their prayers are always successful — Although, *Thirdly*, God delays to give them an answer for some time. — And *Fourthly*, When he does answer, he wants no means to bring about his gracious purposes. My christian brethren, consider these particulars with attention, and see whether there be not great reason for you to beg of God that he would give you at this time the spirit of prayer and supplication. If he does not make us a praying people, it may be feared that he will give us over to destruction: for look around you. See the troubles of *Europe*. Does not your heart bleed, for the shedding of so much christian blood? Examine the state of the christian churches. What coldness and deadness is there in some? And how greatly are they, who have a little life, opposed and persecuted? Consider the danger, that threatens the protestant interest. Are not these so many loud calls upon you to use your interest with God, that he would put a stop to these general calamities? And then look around this kingdom, and see whether it does not stand in need of your prayers: Is there any corner of the island, wherein vice does not abound? And does not the number of swearers and cursers far exceed the number of those who mourn and pray; yea so far, that I fear for one prayer, there are a thousand oaths and profane curses? And though God has been punishing us, yet we are neither reformed nor humbled. We neither deny ourselves our diversions nor our sins. Long have we been declining, and now our friends abroad and at

home are encompassed with sins so provoking, with enemies so numerous and mighty, that we are brought to this extremity, we must either make our way through all by prayer, or else we perish. The imagination of man cannot devise how we should long subsist under our pressing evils, unless we call in mercy and help from heaven. Let us then make God our refuge and strength, and we shall find him a very present help in trouble. Let so many of us as know what our interest is in God, and what the power of prayer is, now in earnest address ourselves to this duty. And we need not fear, but since God allows us a time for prayer, he will also find a time for our deliverance from all our troubles.

But here is our greatest danger — The Lord's people are not stirred up to be hearty and earnest in praying to see an end of these troubles. There seems to be among them a great coolness and backwardness to the duty. This is the worst sign of the times. We have but one remedy, and that we do not take. My christian friends and brethren, if this be your case, beg of God to give you the spirit of prayer and supplication. I have been urging you by several motives to do your duty in these troublesome times: you see and know what it is, now go and practise it. Your weapon is prayer, may God give you grace to use it. If you use it with faith, it will prevail, yea it will be almighty, in heaven and earth. Whatever you want, prayer can supply you. Do you want your corruptions abated? Pray against them. Would you have your graces increased? Pray for them. Would you have the afflicted churches comforted? and our

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own church and kingdom restored to peace and tranquillity? You may relieve them by prayer. If God intends to try us with greater troubles and persecutions, prayer is necessary, that you may be fitted for them. On all these accounts you cannot but see, that there is great need of prayer, and if you do pray, that there are great hopes of success. Oh then let us lay aside all trifling matters, and attend strictly to this. Let us leave off so much talking about what belongs to statesmen, let our subject be what belongs to private christians. Let us pray more, and talk less. Let us speak more to God, and less of men. Speak as much as you will for men, but say nothing against them out of an ordinance. Whatever you have to say against them, let it be in prayer to God for them. This is the christian's duty, and God grant it may be the christian's practice.

Let me leave this one consideration upon your minds. When the public exercises of the Lord's-Day are ended, take up the Bible, and read the history we have been meditating upon. See whether it does not contain more encouragements to pray for the peace of our *Jerusalem* than I have now used — And while your heart is warm with the subject, put it in practice. Go to the throne of grace at the appointed hour, and use your interest with him that sitteth upon the throne. Don't spend your evening in talking of other mens matters, but mind your own duty. The less they mind theirs — the more should you pray for them. And instead of prating, as I hear many professors of religion prate, “ Oh that we might have more public fasts, more
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“ public meetings for prayer, more general re-
 “ formations, &c.” get thee into thy closet, and
 set about thy own reformation as soon as thou
 wilt. Pray and fast, as long as thou wilt, and
 the more thou growest in grace, the more wilt
 thou pray for others, as well as thyself. Let us
 all then with one heart, and one voice now be-
 gin, and God grant we may pray without ceasing,
 as they did in the text, until we obtain the like
 deliverance. And what sweeter, what more
 suitable, what more devout words can we find
 wherewith to conclude, than the collect of our
 church for this day.

“ Almighty and everlasting God, who dost
 “ govern all things in heaven and earth, mer-
 “ cifully hear the supplications of thy people,
 “ and grant us thy peace all the days of our life,
 “ through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”



F I N I S.

For farther encouragement to practise the du-
 ty recommended in this discourse, see a little tract
 entitled — *En Earnest Invitation to the Friends of
 the established Church to set apart one Hour in
 every Week for Prayer and Supplication during the
 present troublesome Times, &c.* Printed for J.
 Worrall in Bell-yard, and E. Withers in Fleet-
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